



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Burmaster statement on signing of several education-related bills

Laws impact virtual schooling, agricultural education, special education funding, and suicide prevention curriculum

MADISON—State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster issued the following statement on the education-related bills that were signed into law today by Gov. Jim Doyle.

“Several important bills were signed into law today that will have a positive impact on public schools in Wisconsin. We now have a virtual education law that supports quality instruction, creates a statewide web academy, and ensures that students who use this education option will have teachers that have received training in on-line education. Other important legislation signed today creates the agricultural education and workforce development council, streamlines some of the school district special education financial reporting requirements, and enhances suicide prevention efforts in schools throughout Wisconsin.”

SB-396: Virtual charter schools

The bill defines a virtual charter school in Wisconsin; requires licensed educators and a minimum number of days of instruction for virtual charter schools; creates a state web academy, which will open on-line learning to more students without having to open enroll in another school; and requires the Legislative Audit Bureau to conduct a financial and performance audit of virtual charter schools by the end of 2009. Other provisions include:

- Teachers must be available to provide direct pupil instruction for at least the minimum numbers of hours specified by grade level under current law. No more than 10 hours in any 24-hour period may count toward this requirement.
- Teachers must respond to inquiries from pupils or from the parents or guardians of pupils by the end of the first school day following the day on which the inquiry is received.
- Teachers are prohibited from teaching on-line, beginning July 1, 2010, if the teacher has not had 30 hours of professional development designed to prepare teachers for on-line teaching.

State Superintendent Burmaster thanked Senator John Lehman and Representative Brett Davis for their work on this legislation.

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AB-83: Creates an agricultural education and workforce development council

The bill creates the Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council in the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP). The membership of the council includes: four legislators; the secretaries of DATCP, Workforce Development, Commerce, and Natural Resources; the State Superintendent of Public Instruction; the president of the University of Wisconsin (UW) System; and the director of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) or their designees; and the chancellor of the UW-Extension. The council's focus will be to look across educational systems and to integrate those systems with workforce development systems and needs in Wisconsin.

State Superintendent Burmaster thanked Representative Alvin Ott and Senator Kathleen Vinehout for their work on this legislation.

AB-906: State special education aid for the salaries of certain pupil services personnel

Currently, the salaries and benefits of school nurses, social workers, psychologists, and counselors who work with special education are among the costs eligible for reimbursement through special education aid. Districts have been required to report full-time equivalency for the identified positions to determine reimbursement. Under this new law, implementing this reimbursement will become easier for school districts by providing the Department of Public Instruction the authority to determine the average percentage of work time that each of the personnel categories spends providing services to children with disabilities. The department would then use the average percentage to provide reimbursement for salary and fringe benefits of eligible pupil services staff, reducing the workload involved by school districts and streamlining the process for reimbursement.

State Superintendent Burmaster thanked Representative Brett Davis and Senator John Lehman for their work on this legislation.

SB 493: Suicide prevention

Current law directs the Department of Public Instruction, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Family Services and the new Department of Children and Families, to develop and conduct training programs in suicide prevention for the professional staff of public and private schools. The DPI already provides suicide prevention programs and training. This law now requires each school board and the governing body of each private school annually to inform their professional staff of the resources available from DPI and other sources regarding suicide prevention.

State Superintendent Burmaster thanked Senator John Lehman and Representative Terry Van Akkeren for their work on this legislation.

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2008_65.pdf.